

TraCen Cape May Education Update #291

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Congratulations!!

The following personnel in the Cape May area passed Coast Guard Institute end-of-course, AQEs, and other tests since the last update:

Name	Work Site	Test
YN2 Giacomino Ruff	TraCen (Security)	E-PME-6

Congratulations, PO Ruff!

And if you've just finished a degree program or have any other noteworthy academic achievement to brag about, please let me know so I can recognize you for it.

Question of the Week

Q: I want to take college courses and heard the Coast Guard will pay for them. Do I just register and pay for them myself, then request reimbursement?

A: The short answer is "no". Tuition assistance (TA) is not a reimbursement program. That is, if you pay up front and expect TA to reimburse you, you'll be waiting a long time. To use TA, you must know which courses you'll be taking (names, course numbers, number of credits, per-credit tuition, any fees that might be covered, and starting and ending dates), then submit an application.

Once your ESO has verified all the info you entered on the application, she'll submit it to the Coast Guard Institute for final processing. You'll then receive an e-mail from the Navy (which acts as the Coast Guard's agent for TA payments). By following the instructions on the e-mail, you'll download your TA authorization. You then put your SSN and signature on the authorization and take it to your school as payment for the courses listed on it.

If TA didn't cover all your tuition costs and/or if there were fees that aren't covered by TA, you'll have pay for them yourself. For more information on TA, how much it covers, what it covers, how to apply for it, and what you must do after you've completed your course, go to <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/ta.asp>.

If you have a question you'd like answered as a Question of the Week, e-mail it to me at andrew.g.webb@uscg.mil.

Wondering What to Major In?

Are you interested in getting a college degree, but unsure about what to major in? Drop by the Education Center and pick up a copy of *College Majors that Work*. This book has an excellent, easy-to-follow system for determining what major best matches your interests.

You should also check out chapters 3 ("Career Exploration Information") and 5 ("Researching Employer and Labor Market Information") of the book *Best Career and Education Web Sites*. Before you dive into a major, with the intention of going into a particular career field, read these chapters. They can help you figure out if there's actually a future in your chosen field. The last thing you want is to invest a lot of time and money in getting a particular degree only to find when you're done that there aren't many jobs available in the field you prepared for or that advancement in that field is slow or frozen.

Interested in Working for Yourself?

Chapters 7 ("Self-Employment and Small Business") and 8 ("Temporary Work, Contract Employment, Freelancing, Teleworking, and Volunteering") of the book *Best Career and Education Web Sites* have many great leads. You can pick up a copy in the Education Center.

DSST Cutback

There are 38 DSSTs in all, but starting on 01 October 2010, only 16 of them will be available through ESOs who are DANTES Test Control Officers (TCO). All other tests will be available only at national test centers in computer-based format. The fee for taking DSSTs at national test centers will be \$80/test.

For a list of which tests will be available through your TCO, go to <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/dsst.asp>.

If you're interested in taking one of the tests which will only be available through national test centers after 01 October, start studying for it now so you can avoid paying the \$80 fee.

ACCC Course Guides Available!

In case you haven't already seen them, you can find the Summer and Fall 2010 course guides for Atlantic Cape Community College in the Exchange, outside the Education Center (Admin Bldg, Room 113), and in the lab waiting area in the Medical Center.

Is Distance Learning for You?

The University of Georgia has come up with an on-line assessment tool you can use to determine if computer-based distance learning is for you. It's called SORT (Student Online Readiness Tool, <http://www.alt.usg.edu/sort/html/sortlau1.html>) and is based on research that says there are "six main topics closely related to a student's success in the online learning environment". These are, Experience with Technology, Access to Technology, Study Habits, Lifestyle, Goals and Purposes, and Learning Preferences. "Each section of SORT has a brief description followed by a questionnaire. Based on your responses to questions, feedback is provided on your personal readiness profile, along with suggested strategies for success and links to more information."

Using TA and GI Bill Benefits at the Same Time

You probably already know that you can use tuition assistance (TA) with any type of financial aid: government grants (including Pell Grants), private grants and scholarships, loans, whatever. The only prohibition is against receiving GI Bill education benefits for the same courses TA is paying for.

Note that I said same courses, rather than "at the same time". This means that if you were taking a total of five 3-credit courses, for example, you could use TA to pay for one or more courses (and any associated course fees), then request GI Bill benefits for the other courses (and only those other courses).

Under this scenario under the MGIB-AD, you'd receive full-time benefits (currently \$1,368/month) if you claimed 12 of those credits for MGIB-AD benefits purposes. You could use this money for **any** purpose: paying tuition and fees, for rent, car repairs, even a vacation. You could also use the money to cover books and supplies for the costs not covered by TA.

Under the new GI Bill, your school would be paid directly for the courses TA isn't covering (tuition and fees). If you were eligible for the housing allowance you'd receive that monthly. If you were eligible for the book stipend, you'd receive that at the beginning of the school term. For the course(s) you used TA to pay for, you could still use the money you received from the housing allowance and/or book stipend to pay fees and other costs not covered by TA.

For Reservists, the MGIB-SR is slightly different. If you're eligible for TA and taking anything less than a half-time course load, you can't receive MGIB-SR payments. (Most schools consider full-time to be 12 credits.) That is, you can use only TA if you're taking less than a half-time course load. Using the example for the MGIB-AD above you'd receive full-time benefits (currently \$333/month) if you claimed 12 of those credits for MGIB-SR benefits purposes. You could use this money for **any** purpose: paying tuition and fees, for rent, car repairs, even a vacation. You could also use the money to cover books and supplies for the costs not covered by TA. However, if you were taking a total of fewer than 6 credits, you'd be able to use only TA.

How Do I Select a College without CG Institute Degree Plans?

Since the Institute stopped producing degree plans last December, many Guardians have been stymied about how to pick a school to get a certificate or degree from. "How do I know if any of my Coast Guard experience credits will count?" is the question I hear most often.

A new booklet entitled *How Do I Select a College without CG Institute Degree Plans?* will walk you through the process. You can drop by TraCen Cape May's Education Center to pick up a copy or download and print it from <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/doc/Booklet04.pdf>.

Be aware that it's formatted as a booklet. If you print it out as it is and try to make sense of it as if it weren't a booklet, you'll fail. Just download it, print it out, feed it into a copier that does double-side copying, and select single-side to double-side. **Don't re-arrange the pages or turn them all in one direction.** Or you can download the file and print it directly from your computer to a double-side copier or printer, that'll give you the same result. Either way, just fold the output in half and you'll have the booklet.

More College Scholarships!

The National Association for Uniformed Services (NAUS) is offering four \$2,000 scholarships for the 2010-2011 school year to NAUS members or spouses, children, or grandchildren of NAUS members. For more information, go to <http://www.naus.org/scholarship/>. **The deadline is 25 June 2010.**

Build Skills for Education Success

If you're about ready to start taking college courses or want to improve one or more ASVAB scores, check out the Online Academic Skills Course (OASC) from Peterson's. It's designed to help you build your math and verbal skills, which will help you score well on exams and excel in your career – in or out of the Coast Guard.

OASC is available free 24/7 to you and your family on the Internet.

How does it work? You first take an initial test to measure your strengths and weaknesses. Then you'll receive a personalized set of lessons based on your test results. Those lessons will engage you with interactive activities, flash cards, quizzes, and practice tests. Once you've completed all the lessons, you'll take another test to evaluate your progress.

For more information, to register, and to get started, go to <http://www.petersons.com/dantes>.

Scholarship and Financial Aid Explorer

The Scholarship and Financial Aid Explorer (SFEX) was developed by the Marine Corps to make it easier for military personnel to find scholarships directly relevant to them and their dependents. SFEX provides a listing of over 600 scholarships and is open to all servicemembers at no cost. You can check it out at <http://www.mcsfex.net/Default.aspx>.

Parents of High School Students, Check This Out

Might your daughter or son benefit from college-level summer study at Cornell University? If so, please tell them about Cornell University Summer College Programs for High School Students.

Cornell's Summer College, now in its forty-ninth year, is one of the nation's longest running and most highly regarded pre-college academic programs. It brings more than 800 academically talented high school sophomores, juniors, and seniors from around the world to Cornell each summer for three- and six-week programs.

Summer College students have the unparalleled opportunity to:

- experience what it's like to live and learn at a great Ivy League university,
- take real university courses,
- work closely with Cornell's world-renowned faculty,
- learn three to six college credits,
- explore majors and career options,
- get a jump on successful college applications,
- make friends from around the world, and
- much, much more.

For more information, go to www.summercollege.cornell.edu.

Earn Up to 12 College Credits for Knowing Another Language

The CollegeBoard has CLEP tests for three different languages through which you can earn up to 12 undergrad college credits. The languages are French, German, and Spanish. And beginning in mid-April, ESOs who are also DANTES Test Control Officers (TCOs) will be able to administer the Spanish test. This will save you from having to find a national test center and pay the (reimbursable) fee for the test.

If you're interested in taking the Spanish CLEP test, you can order it through your TCO/ESO.

Coast Guard Foundation Grants

The Coast Guard Institute is accepting applications for the Coast Guard Foundation Education Grants and Vander Putten Education Grants programs. However, keep in mind that there are **currently no funds for these grants**. While funding is expected to be available in the not-too-distant future, there is no way to predict when this will be. Applications will be processed in the order in which they were received until funds have been exhausted.

Receipts must not be dated more than a year before the date the Institute receives the application. That is, if your application reaches the Institute on 10 April 2010, receipts can't be dated before 10 April 2009. Also, receipts must include a description of the item purchased and must show proof of payment. Copies of receipts must be legible and if you send original receipts, be aware they will not be returned.

If you want to take an exam to be licensed in a particular field (such as physical therapy), you can receive a CG Foundation grant for the books you use to prepare for the exam. For more information, go to <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/grants.asp#cgf>.

TraCen Cape May Testing Calendar

Tests at TraCen Cape May are administered by appointment according to the following schedule:

Mondays (0800): Defense Language Proficiency Tests

Tuesdays (0800): EOCTs and AQEs*

Thursdays (0745): colleges tests, CLEP tests, DSSTs, SATs, ACTs

* If operations or your work schedule make it impossible for you to take an EOCT or AQE on a Tuesday morning, you can take it on a Thursday morning.

This schedule leaves most of the day on Tuesdays, as well as all day on Wednesdays, Fridays available for other occasional tests, counseling, and other face-to-face interactions with you. When no one is taking a language test, the doors to the Education Center are open on Mondays, as well.

If you call and I don't answer the phone, I'm usually administering a test (and, because of the noise, can't talk on the phone) or otherwise busy with someone in the office. E-mail is the best way to get in touch with me.

Thinking of Teaching?

Are you interested in teaching after you leave the Coast Guard? Troops to Teachers also provides counseling and referral services to military personnel interested in beginning a second career in public education as a teacher. And the DANTES Troops to Teachers office will help you identify teacher certification requirements, programs leading to certification, and employment opportunities. The main web site (http://www.dantes.doded.mil/dantes_web/troopstoteachers/index.asp) has all kinds of information about the program. Including a new on-line way to determine if you're eligible to participate in Troops to Teachers: http://www.dantes.doded.mil/dantes_web/troopstoteachers/eligibility.asp.

Leaving the Coast Guard?

If you're leaving the Coast Guard within the next twelve months (whether through retirement, resignation, or expiration of your enlistment), you should be making plans for what you'll be doing after you take off your uniform for the last time. Check out the information on my web site related to career transition (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/careertrans.asp>).

You should also request an education assessment from the Coast Guard Institute (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/collegefaq.asp>) to get a transcript of college credit you've acquired through your service in the Coast Guard. If you don't request an assessment before you leave active duty, you can't get one later.

If you're not planning to go to school right away, you'll probably need to find work. Here are two excellent resources for finding a job – or even a second career. Also, Military.com has a very good series of web pages devoted to veterans (<http://www.military.com/Careers/Home/0,13373,,00.htm>).

And don't discount the idea of working in the public sector. Not only are there thousands of jobs in the federal government, identical to private-sector jobs in which you can put your skills, knowledge, and experience to use while maintaining job security unavailable in the private sector (<http://www.fedjobs.gov/>), governmental entities at all levels – state, county, municipality, school district, port district, etc. – provide similar benefits.

Microsoft Software Home Use Program

If you're on the Coast Guard's payroll (i.e., not a contractor), you're eligible to participate in Microsoft's Software Assurance Home Use Program. The program enables you to get a licensed copy of most Microsoft® Office desktop PC applications to install and use on your home computer. You're also eligible for discounts on other Microsoft software via the Employee Purchase Program.

For more information, go to <https://cgportal.uscg.mil/lotus/my poc/?uri=wcm%3a5b18ff004d89b9a6ae7fbe259abd3cf4>.

ACCC's Library Open for Studying

One more thing: the new campus's classrooms, labs, and library are all state-of-the-art. Even if you're not ready to register for classes right away, you should take the opportunity to visit the campus and look around. The Director of Academic and Student Services has extended a personal invitation to anyone who'd like to use the library to study, for research, or for pleasure reading. It's very quiet, well-lit, and has very comfortable furniture.

Quick Reference Study Guides

The TraCen Education Center also has a binder full of SparkCharts Quick Reference Guides on almost 40 subjects. You're welcome to use these in the Education Center or make copies to take with you. You can check out the subjects available at <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/books.asp#spark>.

Education Library

In addition to SparkCharts, the Education Center also has a library of books on leadership, management, Coast Guard history, and other topics. Also in the library are the latest Professional Qualification Guides (PQGs) for each rating.

The Education Center also has dozens of brochures and books on college, financial aid, the officer program application process, and other things. If there are multiple copies, you're welcome to take one.

Get It in Writing!

A recent article on military.com by retired Coast Guard Chief Terry Howell (<http://military-education.military.com/2009/06/new-gi-bill-advice-get-it-in-writing.html>) provides extremely good advice about how to avoid making costly mistakes when dealing with the VA about your education benefits.

The advice is equally applicable to dealing with *any* government or corporate bureaucracy, for that matter.